The Antecedent Life

BY

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It is my deep-seated conviction that our ability to form an idea is itself proof that that idea is in some manner true. I do not know how I came by this notion, but it seems to me intuitional. The powers of the mind are so limited that we can form no conception of whatever is of itself impossible. We do not ourselves originate what we make or think, but only copy and reproduce in physical form prior realities—ideas which came with the spirit from its home in the eternal world.

There is a point at which what is usually called science must stop and give place to a higher faculty of knowing. The endeavor to set metes and bounds to the universe is certain to fail ; and the operations of the cosmos, moral as well as physical, we may not hope to comprehend within our limited scope of vision. There will come hurricanes to blow down our ephemeral superstructures, and even earthquakes to overturn the foundations themselves. All that we learn by corporeal sense and include by the measuring-line of our understanding belongs to this category of the unstable and perishing.

The attempt to build a scientific tower of Babel, to reach to the sky and be a symbol of the true, will always result in confusion of speech among such builders and their dispersion apart from one another. When they pass the boundaries of their horizon they find themselves embraced in a chaos and void of great darkness, which they declare to be unknowable. In due time the hail comes and sweeps away their structures.

Knowledge is in no proper sense a collection of gleanings from one field and another. Nor is it a compound, more or less heterogeneous, from numerous specifics. It is an energy

—over all, transcending all, and including all. It pertains to the faculty of intellection rather than to that of understanding; it is not a boon from the world of time and limit, but is of the infinite and eternal. It requires no cerebration for its processes, but may employ the corporeal organism for its mirror and medium.

Science, as commonly defined, is concerned with things which are apparent to the senses; intellective knowledge is the perception and possessing of that which really is. What we truly know, therefore, is what we have remembered from the Foreworld, wherein our true being has not been prisoned in the region of sense. It consists of motives, principles, things immutable. Such are charity or love, which seeketh others' benefit; justice, which is the right line of action; beauty, which means fitness for the supreme utility; virtue, which denotes the manly instinct of right; temperance, which restrains every act into due moderation. These are the things of the eternal region, which true souls remember in the sublunary sphere of the senses; and, thus remembering, they put away the eager desire for temporary expedients and advantages for that which is permanent and enduring.

"Where your treasure is," says Jesus, "there will your heart be." Our knowledge is our treasure. What we know we possess. It can never be wrested from us, or forgotten. It is of us, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. Knowing all things that are truly good—love without selfishness, justice without perversion, beauty which is beyond superficialness, virtue which is no mere outside negation or artificial merit, temperance which is the equilibrium of the soul—we include them all, and have our home and country in that world where they are indigenous and perennial. They are the constituents of our being. Flesh and blood will never inhabit that world, nor will anything that is the outcome of flesh and blood long endure. But these essentials of life will never change or perish; and those endowed with them will be as enduring as they. However they may be circumscribed by space, temporal conditions and limitations, they live in eternity. Death will not extin-

guish their being. They live where death had never a place, and they will continue after the scorpion shall have given himself the fatal sting.

The heavenly abode of spirits and divine beings is by no means geographically distant and distinct from the regions occupied by those existing in the external world. Indeed it is more than probable that the dead, as they are designated in common speech—those who are disbodied—often cling even abnormally to the earth and its ways; and that they who have labored zealously for an aim or enterprise continue their endeavors. The demise of the body can hardly be regarded intelligently as changing any element of the nature, character, or even acquired quality, but only the form of existence. We have read with admiration the exquisite utterance of the little verse that "that which went was not love." We may add to it that that which dies is not man. The body is by no means the personality, but is purely adventitious. When it has accomplished its purpose, or has become unfit, it is discarded like an implement that is broken or a garment worn out.

It is not necessary to die in order to become superior to the conditions of material existence. The same causes which brought us to the corporeal life are very likely to continue. The condition must, therefore, be exceeded, or else, like the weed which is cut off by the hoe but not uprooted, we will appear in some other way.

We may hardly regard it as good form to speak of immortality and eternity as conditions to be entered upon after death. Life beyond the grave, when considered under that aspect, is a mirage of the fancy. The eternal life has nothing in any way to do with the grave. We may obtain a better conception of it when we contemplate eternity as boundless and unconditional, yet comprising all that is finite and conditional. It signifies nothing which relates to time and duration, but only to that which pertains to itself. As the heavens are beyond the earth and yet include it, so Divinity is above and beyond and yet contains within its grasp all the spirits of men.

The eternal life is therefore spiritual and divine. It pertains

to the psychic nature, to the soul, which is from the Divinity, and which, while in a manner objective and apart, is participant, nevertheless, of the divine nature and quality. Emanuel Swedenborg has set this forth admirably. Acknowledging that God is love, he describes love as the life of man. Thus we are in the eternal world, every one of us; and believing this, we have the eternal life in full possession. Whether, as denizens of this earth, we live or die, it is all the same: we shall be in the embrace of Deity as we have always been.

Life is not shut up wholly in the things of time and sense. The spirit of man never dwelt in the body in its entirety, but is of the world beyond. Only a part of the soul is ever developed in the physical existence—in some more, in others less. Its real habitation is, as the Apostle has described, "not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." It extends into the body, as though with antennæ, and so we are able to think, live, and attempt to act. We are likewise able to perceive real truth by that intellect which is above the understanding; to divine, and to receive, even into the external consciousness, perception from the Foreworld. The philosopher Jacobi wisely declared that "in moral feeling there is a presentiment of eternity."

The vail which seems to be interposed between the temporal existence and the life which we are living in the eternal world is more apparent than actual; clouds that hide the sun from our view are not placed in the sky for that purpose, but arise from the earth beneath. If we did not ourselves drink the Lethean draught—if we did not project from ourselves the sensuous obscuring into the sky above our heads—we might even now behold the Real, which is both the ideal and eternal.

I am very confident that what is generally described as intuition, insight, inspiration, is this sub-conscious and superconscious intelligence. It has been explained by the most gifted of philosophers as a remembering, a reproducing, and bringing anew into consciousness of what we knew in the Foreworld. It is from the very core of our being, and belongs to that sphere of life to which we have become to a great degree forgetful, if not even alien. Yet there can be no activity with-

out it, any more than there can be action without the direction of the will.

As the soul and superior intellect are antecedent to sensation, the intuitive thought is not perceived by the consciousness. Having little to do with cerebration, it does not wear away the brain-matter. It pertains to a life that is lived beyond the physical sense. It is a state of illumination rather than a receiving of messages from supernal powers. Indeed, we may regard ourselves as safe in affirming that there really are no new revelations. The same Word that ordained light to exist never ceases so to ordain. The world may vary in form and aspect, but that Spirit which upholds it is always the same. Whoever will ascend in his interior thought beyond the changing scenes will know and will mirror in himself the unchanging.

Better than any achievement of wonderful powers is that wholesome condition of the mind and affections which produces as its own outcome those sentiments and emotions of justice and reverence, those deep principles of unselfish regard for the well-being of others, which evince the person himself in every part of his being as pure, good, and true.

In the simple worship of the older Persians, homage was rendered by each to the pure law of living, to the good spirits that inspired and protected him, and to his own soul. The aim of life and the essential substance of that ancient faith were the integrity of the soul, its wholeness and oneness with Divinity. That old doctrine, that the true man venerates his own soul, is to me very attractive. A fragment of the *Hadokht Nask*, a book of the old Persian Sacred Writings now lost, represents the Divine Being, Ahur-Mazda, as relating to the prophet and priest Zoroaster the story of the journeyings of the soul after the separation from the corporeal structure. For three days it remains at the head of the body as though expecting to resume the former functions. All the while it is chanting praises and enjoying the most exquisite delight. It then sets out for the celestial home, regaled all the way by fragrant breezes. Arriving at the Bridge of Judgment, there appears a figure like a beautiful maiden, invested about with supernal

light, elegant in form, comely and vigorous as a youth of fifteen, with wings, pure as the purest things on earth—

> " Then the soul of the righteous spoke to her :
> ' What maiden art thou, most beautiful guardian ? ' "

Then answers the form :

> " I am the very life, O youth, which thou hast lived—thy pure thought, thy holy speech, thy worthy action, thy merit embodied in thyself. Every one loves thee for thy greatness, thy goodness, thy excellence, thy resistance and triumph over evil. Thou art truly like me, who am thy pure thought, holy speech, and worthy acts. I was beloved already, and thou hast made me more beloved; I was beautiful before, and thou hast made me more beautiful still. Thou makest the pleasant more pleasant, the fair yet fairer, the desirable yet more desirable ; and me, the one sitting on high, thou seatest still higher by thy pure thought, thy holy speech, and righteous action."

Here we have a representation of that superior principle of our being and its station beyond our mundane nature in the world. We have likewise a suggestion of the untold benefits attained by the soul from its incarnation and upright conduct in the earth-life. Our personality is still in the eternal region, our individuality here. We may seem in this world to be rich and overflowing with abundance, whereas in our diviner nature we may have become as needy as Lazarus at the gate. A man with treasures and jewels of which he knows not the value is as poor as he would be without them. The one who believes, who knows his tenure of citizenship in the celestial region has the life, is of the eternal world which the other does not see or know.

Thus death is not the ultimate outcome, the great reality of existence. The human soul is infinitely more than a vagrant in the earth, an orphan wandering from Nowhence to Nowhither. It is like the bird entering at one window, flying about for a time, and passing out at another. It comes from the eternal home and will return to it, enriched with manifold experiences and more worthy of the Divine Lord.

Thus existing in communication with both worlds, the con-

ception is by no means visionary that the person may transmit knowledge from the one to the other, and be the intermediary for imparting vivific energy from the superior source which shall be efficacious for the restoring of the sick to health. We may not unreasonably doubt as historic verity that such a man as Jesus lived upon the earth, but we cannot intelligently dispute that maladies were healed and other wonders wrought, as described in the Gospels, "by the finger of God." Like the electric force by which so much is accomplished, yet of which so little is really known, the power which is commonly described as miraculous is capable of achieving wonders that will hardly be credited.

Many are like the bat and the owl, able only to see clearly in the twilight but blinded by the sun at noonday. The eternal world, however, is not shut away from us by inaccessible doors or hidden by impenetrable darkness. The pure in heart can see there; and the love of goodness, enthusiasm for the right, unselfish motive and conduct, exceed the limitations of time.

Our own consciousness often reiterates the testimony of pre-existent life. We have a psychal memory which reminds us that what we are we have been somewhere for ages. There are remembrances of this, which awaken now and then with all the vividness of reality. When we enter into communication with a superior mind, we perceive ourselves in a manner passing over our usual limits and in some degree passing into the All. We apprehend in a manner what we may become, and have a deeper sense of what we really are. In all this there is the prophecy of what we shall be, interblended with our actual other-world subsistence. The fruition comes when we perceive the moral quality to be the real vital energy. Love, which redeems from selfishness and bestiality and exalts to ideal excellence, is the basis of life and creation, and includes all that is, was, and will be. Further we may not know.